

an adversary? Well, if you don't, do you think they are an economic adversary? Do you think they would like to be a military adversary? Do you realize what they are doing in space in order to become a world power?

I came to Congress a long time ago, and I have been talking about balanced budgets, but now this problem is so massive it can't be solved, as the Senator from California said, by regular order. We are going to have to take a good look at the whole picture. We need some commonsense folks who will work together, who will respect each other—did you hear what I said, respect each other—and who will recommend the tough decisions that must be made in order to get this Nation's fiscal policy back on track.

I realize on the one side you have folks saying: Does that cut Social Security? Does that cut Medicare? Then on the other side you have folks who say: Does that mean you worry about raising taxes? Those are legitimate concerns. Every one of us, every family member in America has to deal with these kinds of questions in their own family's budget. When we spend more than we bring in, we have to make choices. We have to make adjustments. It is the responsible thing to do.

It will not be easy. It will not be easy politically, especially with people holding that club of the next election over their heads saying: I am going to beat you into the ground and beat you politically to death if you make these tough choices. But in the end I trust, because of the understanding of the American people of their government and their understanding of their own family budgets, they will trust a bipartisan group of lawmakers accountable to the American people who will have examined the budget, hashed out their differences, and agreed to a plan that will make us solvent again.

Without drastic measures we risk saddling our children with debt that can never be repaid and credit that cannot be restored. We have the opportunity right now to try to fix it. I urge our colleagues to support this amendment, and I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Tennessee is recognized.

STATE OF THE UNION

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I look forward to the President's State of the Union Address on Wednesday, as I know most Americans do. There is a lot of talk about how the President might reconnect with the American people. The President himself said a couple of days ago, after Massachusetts elected a Republican Senator, that perhaps he had not been talking to the American people directly about core values. If I may do this in a respectful way, I would like to make a suggestion about what the President might say on Wednesday evening.

To reconnect with the American people, I suggest in his State of the Union

Address the President talk first about creating jobs; second, about reining in the national debt; and make terrorism his third subject. Then it would not hurt my feelings one bit if he stopped his speech right there and focused his unswerving attention on jobs, debt and terrorism until he has them all headed in a better direction. After all, in my view, the President struggled in his first year not only because his agenda veered too far to the left but because he took too many big bites out of too many apples and tried to swallow them all at once.

Years ago, I learned that a Governor who throws himself into a single issue with everything he has for as long as it takes can usually wear out everybody else. I think that is true for Presidents, too. In 1952, President Dwight D. Eisenhower said, "I shall go to Korea." Then he focused on that one problem, ended the conflict, and Americans thanked him for it.

I hope President Obama would focus with Eisenhower-like intensity on jobs. In the 1980s, I found the best way to do that was not to try to turn my State, Tennessee, upside-down all at once. We were then the third poorest State in the Union. My goal was raising family incomes. I didn't try to turn it upside-down all at once, but I went step by step—sometimes learning as I went—amending banking laws, defending right-to-work, keeping debt and taxes low, recruiting Japanese industry and then the auto industry, building four-lane highways so the auto suppliers could get to the auto plants, and finally a 10-step "Better Schools" plan which included centers and chairs of excellence for higher education.

In my view, a step-by-step job strategy for the country should include tax cuts, less regulation, certainty so people can make their plans, free trade, a balanced labor climate, good educational opportunities, and clean but cheap energy. Unfortunately, the President has too often proposed higher taxes, more regulation, uncertainty, protectionism, expensive labor policy, higher college tuitions (as Medicare costs are passed on to States), a national energy tax, and new costs for the businesses that we count on to create jobs.

As for debt, Democrats in Congress are trying this week to raise the national debt limit by \$1.9 trillion, an amount that is more than the total Federal budget in 1999. To be sure, President Obama inherited some of this, but he has run up a \$1.5 trillion debt in just one year and it took President Bush 8 years to accumulate a \$2 trillion debt. The solution for a boat sinking because it has a hole in it is not to put more holes in it.

Finally, the President deserves credit for his decisions on Iraq and Afghanistan but bringing terrorists from Guantanamo to Illinois, trying the 9/11 mastermind in New York City, and failing to interrogate the Christmas Eve "underwear bomber" in Detroit shows dan-

gerous confusion about how to deal with terrorists.

When I became Governor, Ned McWherter, then the Democratic house speaker, said, "I want to help because if the Governor succeeds the State succeeds." In the same way, I want President Obama to succeed. The best way for him to do that, I respectfully suggest, is to declare an end to the era of the 2,700-page bills and to work with both political parties, step by step, on jobs, debt, and terrorism to help Washington re-earn the trust of the American people.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from North Dakota is recognized.

CONRAD-GREGG AMENDMENT

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, tomorrow we are going to vote on the question of whether we establish a bipartisan debt commission, a commission empowered to come up with a plan, a plan if 14 of the 18 Members would agree, would come to the Senate for a vote.

This story ran recently in Newsweek. This was actually the cover of Newsweek:

How Great Powers Fall; Steep Debt, Slow Growth, and High Spending Kill Empires—And America Could Be Next.

Inside, the story reported:

This is how empires decline. It begins with a debt explosion. It ends with an inexorable reduction in the resources available for the Army, Navy and Air Force. . . . If the United States doesn't come up soon with a credible plan to restore the federal budget to balance over the next five to 10 years, the danger is very real that a debt crisis could lead to a major weakening of American power.

It is not hard to see how that could happen. Since 2000, the debt has exploded. In the previous administration the debt doubled. It has increased again with the economic downturn, and we are now on a course to have a gross debt that will be 114 percent of the gross domestic product of the United States.

That is the short term. We can handle a debt of 114 percent of the gross domestic product. We have done it before. We did it after World War II. Japan has a debt right now of 189 percent of their gross domestic product.

The real challenge confronting America is that, according to the Congressional Budget Office, we are on course to have a debt that will reach 400 percent of our gross domestic product over the next 50 years. Nobody believes that is a sustainable situation—not the head of the Congressional Budget Office, not the head of the Office of Management and Budget, not the former head of the General Accounting Office, not the head of the Federal Reserve, not the Secretary of Treasury—all of them have said a debt of that magnitude poses a systemic threat to the economic security of the United States.